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# Semai language

**Semai** (*Engrok Semai*) is a Mon–Khmer language of western Malaysia spoken by about 44,000 Semai people. It is perhaps the only Aslian language which is not endangered, and even has 2,000 monolingual speakers.

| Semai | |
|---|---|
| Engrok Semai | |
| **Native to** | Peninsular Malaysia |
| **Ethnicity** | 42,400 Semai people (2008)[1] |
| **Native speakers** | 10,000 (2007)[1] |
| **Language family** | Austroasiatic<br>▪ Aslian<br>▪ Senoic<br>▪ **Semai** |
| **Writing system** | Latin |
| **Language codes** | |
| **ISO 639-3** | `sea` |
| **Glottolog** | `sema1266` (http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/sema1266)[2] |

One notable aspect of Semai phonology is its highly irregular pattern of expressive reduplication, showing discontiguous copying from just the edges of the reduplicant's base, thus forming a minor syllable.

Examples of words in Semai:

| English | Malay | Semai |
|---|---|---|
| I | Saya | Eng |
| Eat | Makan | Cak |
| Drink | Minum | Ngaut |
| Bathe | Mandi | Mehmu |
| Clean | Bersih | Parlain |
| Good | Bagus | Bor |
| Chicken | Ayam | Bafung/Fung |
| Rice | Beras | Cengroy |
| Mushroom | Cendawan | Cenai |
| Why | Kenapa | Jalek |
| How | Bagaimana | Rahalook |

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## Phonology

### Vowels

Oral vowels

| | Front | Central | Back |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Close** | i iː | ɨ ɨː | u uː |
| **Close-mid** | e eː | | o oː |
| **Open-mid** | ɛ ɛː | ə | ɔ ɔː |
| **Open** | | ɑ ɑː | |

Nasal vowels

| | Front | Central | Back |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Close** | ĩ ĩː | ɨ̃ ɨ̃ː | ũ ũː |
| **Mid** | ɛ̃ ɛ̃ː | ə̃ | ɔ̃ ɔ̃ː |
| **Open** | | ɑ̃ ɑ̃ː | |

## Consonants

| | | Bilabial | Alveolar | Palatal | Velar | Glottal |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Plosive** | **voiceless** | p | t | c | k | ʔ |
| | **voiced** | b | d | ɟ | g | |
| **Nasal** | **voiced** | m | n | ɲ | ŋ | |
| | **preploded** | ᵇm | ᵈn | ᶢɲ | ᵍŋ | |
| **Rhotic** | | | ɾ~r | | | |
| **Lateral** | | | l | | | |
| **Fricative** | | | s | | | h |
| **Approximant** | | w | | j | | |

# References


1. Semai (https://www.ethnologue.com/19/language/sea/) at *Ethnologue* (19th ed., 2016)
2. Hammarström, Harald; Forkel, Robert; Haspelmath, Martin, eds. (2017). "Semai" (http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/sema1266). *Glottolog 3.0*. Jena, Germany: Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History.


# Further reading


- Diffloth, Gerard. 1976a. Minor-Syllable Vocalism in Senoic Languages. In Philip N. Lenner, Laurence C. Thompson, and Stanley Starosta (eds.), *Austroasiatic Studies, Part I*, 229-247. Honolulu: The University of Hawaii Press.
- Diffloth, Gerard. 1976b. Expressives in Semai. In Philip N. Lenner, Laurence C. Thompson, and Stanley Starosta (eds.), *Austroasiatic Studies, Part I*, 249-264. Honolulu: The University of Hawaii Press.
- Hendricks, Sean. 2001. Bare-Consonant Reduplication Without Prosodic Templates: Expressive Reduplication in Semai. *Journal of East Asian Linguistics* 10: 287-306.

- Phillips, Timothy C. 2013. Linguistic Comparison of Semai Dialects. SIL Electronic Survey Reports 2013-010: 1-111.

## External links

- http://projekt.ht.lu.se/rwaai RWAAI (Repository and Workspace for Austroasiatic Intangible Heritage)
- http://hdl.handle.net/10050/00-0000-0000-0003-66BF-5@view Semai in RWAAI Digital Archive

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